

Understanding Opioids

Question: What are opioids?

Opioids are painkillers which are pain-relieving drugs either naturally derived from poppy flowers or lab-made, semi-synthetic substitutes.

Question: What are the risks of opioids?

- Drowsiness
- Constipation
- Slowed breathing

Question: What are common brands of opioids?

- Butorphanol
- Hydrocodone/Ibuprofen
- Ibuprofen/Oxycodone
- Morphine
- Codeine
- fentanyl
- hydromorphone

Question: What are signs of abuse from opioids?

- Changes in attitude or personality
- Avoiding contact with family and friends
- Changes in hobbies, activities, or sports

Question: How do you help someone with drug abuse?

- Learn about addiction
- Encourage them to seek professional help

Question: What are the proper uses of opioids?

- Post-surgical pain relief
- pain from trauma or chronic illness
- cough suppression
- diarrhea treatment

Question: How do opioids work in the body?

- Opioids work by interacting with nerve cells in the brain and body by activating opioid receptors that block pain signals, this produces effects such as relaxation and euphoria.

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Question: Why can opioid abuse be dangerous?

Opioids can become dangerous because taking more than prescribed can lead to addiction and dependence. Opioids can lead to an overdose can cause slowed breathing, potentially leading to death. Injecting opioids increases the risk of HIV, hepatitis, and other infections.

Question: What Are the Signs of Opioid abuse and addiction and how do you know they are suffering from abuse?

- Taking higher doses than prescribed
- Seeking opioids from multiple doctors
- Mood swings
- Avoiding family and friends
- Borrowing or stealing medication.

Question: How Do Opioids Make People Feel?

- Relaxed and a feeling of euphoria

Question: How can opioid addiction be treated?

- Medication
- Behavior therapy

Question: What medications treat opioid addiction?

- Methadone
- Buprenorphine
- Lofexidine
- Naltrexone

Question: How is behavioral therapy helpful? How does it work?

Behavioral therapy addresses the mental health issues associated with addiction

Question: How do you help someone with an opioid addiction?

- Listen without judgment
- Offer support
- Encourage them to seek professional help

Question: What resources offer help and support?

- SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
- American Society of Addiction Medicine
- Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988

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Question: What substances have contributed to the increase in overdose deaths?

Illicitly manufactured fentanyl, cocaine, methamphetamine, and xylazine have all contributed to rising overdose deaths.

Question: Why is it important to have access to overdose prevention information?

Understanding overdose risks, recognizing symptoms, and knowing how to respond can help save lives.

Question: What is tolerance in relation to opioid use?

Tolerance occurs when the body adapts to opioids, requiring higher doses to achieve the same effects.

Question: What is physical dependence on opioids?

Physical dependence includes tolerance and withdrawal symptoms when opioid use is suddenly stopped or reduced.

Question: What has been the trend in stimulant use?

Methamphetamine use has been increasing, contributing to rising overdose deaths.

Question: What is overamping?

Overamping refers to a stimulant overdose, which can cause heart problems, strokes, agitation, or delirium.

Question: Can stimulant overdoses be reversed like opioid overdoses?

No, there is no medication that reverses stimulant overdoses like naloxone does for opioids, but medical treatment can manage symptoms.

Question: What happens to the body during an opioid overdose?

Opioids can slow or stop breathing, causing respiratory depression, which can lead to death without intervention.

Question: What increases an individual's risk of overdose?

High doses, returning to drug use after a period of abstinence, using drugs with unknown potency, mixing drugs, and using alone.

Question: How can community factors contribute to overdose risk?

Limited access to healthcare, lack of drug checking tools, and inadequate availability of naloxone increase overdose risk.

Question: What is harm reduction?

Harm reduction includes public health strategies to reduce overdose risks, such as syringe programs, drug checking, and naloxone distribution.

Question: What steps can individuals take to prevent overdose?

Understanding personal risk, gathering information, carrying naloxone, and using drug checking tools like fentanyl test strips.

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Question: What is naloxone?

Naloxone is an FDA-approved medication that reverses opioid overdoses by restoring breathing.

Q: How is naloxone administered?

It can be given as a nasal spray or an injection into the muscle.

What is nalmefene, and how does it compare to naloxone?

Nalmefene is another opioid overdose reversal medication that lasts longer than naloxone but may cause extended withdrawal symptoms.

Question: Can naloxone treat any type of overdose?

Naloxone specifically reverses opioid overdoses but may be less effective if other sedating substances like alcohol or benzodiazepines are involved.

Question: Where can people get naloxone?

Naloxone is available by prescription, over the counter, and through harm reduction programs, community organizations, and vending machines.

Q: What are the signs of an opioid overdose?

Unconsciousness, slow or no breathing, blue or pale skin, pinpoint pupils, and gurgling or choking sounds.

Question: What are the steps to respond to an opioid overdose?

- Check for responsiveness.
- Administer naloxone.
- Call 911 and provide rescue breaths.
- Place the person in the recovery position and wait for EMS.

Question: What should you NOT do during an overdose?

Do not slap or shake the person, put them in a cold bath, inject them with substances, or try to make them vomit.

Question: Can someone be forced into treatment after an overdose?

No, individuals can refuse medical care, but they should be provided with harm reduction resources and monitored for overdose recurrence.

Question: How long do medications like buprenorphine and methadone need to be taken?

These medications can be taken safely for months, years, or even a lifetime to support recovery.

Question: How can EMS providers help overdose survivors?

They can provide naloxone, link patients to peer recovery specialists, and refer them to treatment.

Question: What is a Naloxone Leave Behind program?

It allows EMS to leave naloxone kits with overdose survivors, increasing the chance they will seek help.

Question: What is the role of Good Samaritan Laws in overdose response?

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These laws protect individuals from legal consequences when they seek help for an overdose.

Question: Why is community engagement important in overdose prevention?

Engaging people who use drugs, healthcare providers, and harm reduction organizations leads to better strategies to reduce overdose deaths.

Question: What is the opioid epidemic?

The opioid epidemic is a public health crisis in the United States that has resulted in millions of people developing opioid use disorder and has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths over the past two decades. It was declared a Public Health Emergency by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 2017.

Question: When did the opioid epidemic begin, and what caused it?

The epidemic's roots trace back to the late 1990s when prescription opioid painkillers became widely available. The increased prescribing of opioids led to a rise in opioid use disorder, overdose, and death.

Question: What are opioids?

Opioids are drugs that interact with receptors in the brain to reduce pain. They include prescription medications like oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, and morphine, as well as illegal substances like heroin.

Question: How are opioids different from opiates?

Opiates refer specifically to naturally derived opioids, such as heroin, morphine, and codeine. In contrast, opioids include both natural and synthetic compounds.

Question: What are narcotics?

Historically, narcotics referred to substances that dull the senses and relieve pain. While some still use the term to describe all illegal drugs, "opioid" is now the preferred term for both legal and illegal opioid substances.

The Four Waves of the Opioid Epidemic

Question: What are the four waves of the opioid epidemic?

The opioid epidemic has progressed through four overlapping waves:

- **First Wave (1990s-2010):** Increased opioid prescriptions led to higher addiction rates, with drugs like OxyContin and Vicodin being commonly prescribed.
- **Second Wave (2010-2013):** Heroin overdose deaths surged as people dependent on prescription opioids turned to heroin.
- **Third Wave (2013-present):** Overdose deaths from synthetic opioids, particularly fentanyl, increased.
- **Fourth Wave (ongoing):** The use of multiple substances, such as fentanyl mixed with cocaine or methamphetamine, has escalated overdose deaths.

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Question: How did the fourth wave of the opioid epidemic differ from previous waves?

Unlike earlier waves, which followed geographic trends, the fourth wave affects both rural and urban communities at similar rates.

Question: What groups are most affected by opioid overdoses?

According to the CDC's 2022 data, overdose deaths disproportionately impact:

- Males more than females
- People aged 35-44
- American Indian/Alaska Native and non-Hispanic populations

Question: What trends have Northwestern University researchers observed in Illinois?

Their research highlights an increase in overdose deaths among older adults (55-64 years old) and non-Hispanic Black adults.

Question: What is Naloxone (Narcan), and how does it help?

Naloxone is an opioid overdose reversal medication that temporarily blocks opioid effects by binding to opioid receptors. It can be administered as a nasal spray or an injection and is available over the counter.

Question: Where can people access Naloxone?

Naloxone is available for free at some government offices and public libraries. In Illinois, school officials are also allowed to administer it in case of an overdose emergency.

Question: What is harm reduction, and how does it help?

Harm reduction is a public health approach that focuses on minimizing the risks associated with drug use. Strategies include:

- Providing naloxone and overdose counseling
- Distributing fentanyl and xylazine test strips
- Offering referrals to health services

Question: What is the "Block by Block" initiative?

This program, led by Northwestern researchers, identifies high-overdose areas and sends community outreach workers to distribute naloxone, test strips, and training to reduce fatalities.

Question: What is the MAT Act, and how does it help?

The Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment (MAT) Act allows healthcare professionals to prescribe these medications without specialized training, increasing access to treatment.

Question: When was the first recorded use of opium?

Opium use was first described in ancient Egyptian texts around 3,000 years ago.

Question: What plant is opium derived from?

Opium is extracted from the poppy flower.

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Question: What were the early uses of opium?

Opium was used both to induce euphoria and to relieve pain.

Question: When was morphine discovered and isolated?

Morphine, a chemical compound in opium, was discovered and isolated for medical use in the 1900s.

Question: What are opiates?

Opiates are naturally derived compounds from opium, such as morphine and codeine, used for pain relief.

Question: How did synthetic opioids come into existence?

In the 20th century, experiments with opiates led to the creation of synthetic compounds that mimic the effects of natural opiates.

Question: Why are synthetic opioids called "opioids" instead of "opiates"?

The term "opioid" (meaning "opiate-like") was introduced to distinguish synthetic compounds from natural opiates. However, today, both natural and synthetic versions are referred to as opioids.

Question: Why are opioids highly addictive?

Opioids are extremely addictive because they strongly stimulate the brain's opioid receptors, reinforcing repeated use.

Question: What makes synthetic opioids particularly dangerous?

Some synthetic opioids are so powerful that even a tiny amount, smaller than a grain of sand, can be fatal to a person of any size, age, or health condition.

Question: Are all opioids legal?

No, some opioids are legally prescribed for medical use, while others are illegal and unregulated in the U.S. and most other countries.

Question: Why are illegal opioids more dangerous than legal ones?

Illegal opioids are difficult to identify, may be mixed with unknown substances, and are often more potent and unpredictable than prescribed opioids.